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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON U.S. POLICY IN MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, February 12, focuses on an earthquake that hit the region, including Jordan, yesterday morning. Lead stories also address continued violence in both the Palestinian Territories and Iraq.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The democracy of killing and racism"

Daily columnist Khaled Mahadin opines on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (02/12): "The latest ingenuity of the alliance of the racist Zionism and the racist American Christian right-wing is the encroachment of American democracy upon us. This invasion is part of a new American war, that uses not the blind American war machine, but rather thoughts and ideas, as declared by Rumsfeld and Powell.. Over more than sixty years, the United States was the greatest supporter of fascist, military and totalitarian regimes in the Arab and Muslim world, in Asia, and South America. Because of this support, millions of people were killed here and there, nationalist liberation movements were aborted in dozens of countries, and the United States provided full protection for tens of dictators and murderers. This is why America's talk of invading the Arab world, the Middle East and the Muslim world with what Washington calls democracy is amusing. The first step was Afghanistan and the second step was Iraq. We do not think that any sane person in our world could even take America's new call seriously, simply because Washington knows that democracy in the Arab and Muslim world will yield the real enemy of America's interests and plans. Real democracy will not bring into power regimes and leaderships that accept to work under the American umbrella, or take its orders, or even allow it to wreath corruption, conspiracy and racism against Islam, real Christianity and Arab nationalism.. The American democracy that Washington is calling for as being in our best interest is another form of the destructive invasion that is targeting the Arab homeland and the Muslim world to benefit the Zionist enemy and the Christian right-wing.. The American animosity towards Arabism, Arabs, Islam and Muslims makes this call for democracy another lie in the mountain-worth of American lies."

-- "A large Middle East!"

Daily columnist Tarek Masarweh writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (02/12): "The most significant presence that Washington has managed to achieve in the region to date is its military presence, not democracy, not human rights. The changes in the region that Washington likes to pride itself of are nothing but changes on the surface resulting from fear, degradation and bribery.. Democracy cannot be established in this region without real peace that stops Israel - and the United States - from military occupation and invasion, threatening, and stealing the Arab fortunes. As for terrorism that Washington is waving its arms about, it is the making of Washington itself. It is the incubator and it pushes for it with the desperation, frustration and humiliation that it invokes in the region. Looking for the roots of terrorism is this region's religion is but another humiliation that pushes people even more towards that type of violence. The Americans and their allies would do well to leave freedom, democracy and human rights to grow in this part of the world, without their military boots and their hamburgers and without the moral degradation."

-- "The American public diplomacy hoax: why do they keep insulting us?"

Opinion writer Rami Khouri writes on the op-ed page of centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (02/11): "The serious controversy over Washington's use or misuse of intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program is not an isolated phenomenon. It reflects a much deeper weakness in how the United States interacts with cultures such as those of the Middle East. We can watch this clash of cultures taking place before our eyes in other fields, such as the U.S. government's use of broadcasting and print media to influence attitude vis--vis the U.S. in the Arab Islamic world.. Arabs and Americans are like ships passing in the night, sounding their horns, firing their guns, making known their views, but having no impact on the other. The epitome of this is the widening gap between Arabs' perceptions of the U.S. and many Americans' flawed interpretations of those Arab perceptions.

Khouri continues: "The American president's intellectual terror ('they hate our freedom') is simplistic, wrong and dangerous and an inappropriate and ineffective retort to the world views of the criminals who have terrorized and killed thousands of Americans and other nationals. Scores of public opinion polls, focus groups and others have confirmed a thousand times over that most Arabs and Muslims admire basic American values, but are angered primarily by American foreign policies and, to a lesser extent, the arrogant manner in which the U.S. presents its views and dictates policy to the world. A common intellectual, cultural and political response to this in the United States is that something is deeply wrong in Arab and Islamic societies, and must be fixed, including education curricula, governance systems, economic trends, women's conditions and the mass media.. If the U.S. really wanted to make the Middle East a better place and the U.S. a safer place, it should start by examining the impact of its own and Israel's policies on the Arab-Islamic world, as well as exploring faults within Arab-Islamic societies.. At many levels today - Palestine/Israel, Iraq, the war against terror, mass media, public diplomacy, democratic reform, religion and secularism - Americans and Arabs are interacting, but not communicating.

Khouri concludes: "The Middle East is a mess, America has been attacked, and anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli sentiments are at an all-time high in the region and the world. By arguing that our region is troubled and violent because Arabs and Muslims hate American values, and then attempting to correct this by launching television, radio and magazine efforts in Arabic, the U.S. government perpetuates a fatal combination of political blindness and cultural misperception that is only going to exacerbate the gap between Americans and Arabs, rather than close it.. Al-Hurra [the U.S. Arabic-language satellite TV channel], like the U.S. government's Radio Sawa and Hi magazine before it, will be an entertaining, expensive and irrelevant hoax. Where do they get this stuff? Why do they keep insulting us like this?"

GNEHM